

**Adolf Warski**

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**ROSA LUXEMBURG'S  
POSITION ON THE TACTICAL  
PROBLEMS OF REVOLUTION  
(1922)**



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## TRANSLATOR'S INTRODUCTION

Adolf Warski (born Adolf Warszawski; 1868-1937) was one of the most prominent activists of the Polish workers movement.

He was a member of the Social-Revolutionary Party "Proletariat", the first workers' party in tsarist Russia, then he became the founder and one of the leaders of the Social Democratic Party of the Kingdom of Poland and Lithuania (SDKPiL). He took part in the 1905 Revolution and was imprisoned by the tsarist authorities. After World War I, he was one of the co-founders and leaders of the Communist Party of Poland. On her behalf, in 1926, he became a member of the Sejm (lower chamber of the Polish parliament). In 1930, at the 5th Congress of the CPP, he was removed from major party positions as a result of an inter-factional struggle. He emigrated to the USSR, where during the Great Purge he was arrested and executed as a "spy-terrorist", like most of the leaders of the CPP.

As one of the leaders of the SDKPiL, he was a close comrade of Rosa Luxemburg. This article, published in 1922 in the German journal "Kommunistische Internationale"<sup>1</sup>, was written by Warski in response to Paul Levi's "revelations". Levi is the author of a legend that contrasted the "democrat" Luxemburg with the "authoritarian" Bolsheviks. Warski refutes this legend definitively. Considering that even today (crypto-)liberal ventriloquists use the corpse of Luxemburg as an dummy, Warski's work remains a priceless setting straight of the record of a great revolutionary.

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1 „Rosa Luxemburgs Stellung zu den taktischen Problemen der Revolution”. The current translation is based on the Polish translation published in: Warski A. „Wybór pism i przemówień”, Warsaw 1958, v. II, p. 147-179.

## ADOLF WARSKI: ROSA LUXEMBURG'S POSITION ON THE TACTICAL PROBLEMS OF REVOLUTION

"We made mistakes... many mistakes... serious mistakes..." (*Lenin*, see his various speeches and articles from 1918 to today).

"The Bolsheviks certainly made various mistakes in their policy and they are probably doing them even now... - show me a revolution in which no mistakes were made! The thought of a revolutionary policy without errors, and in this completely unprecedented situation, is so absurd that it is probably only worthy of a German teacher... The blame for the mistakes of the Bolsheviks is ultimately borne by the international proletariat, and above all, it is the unheard-of, hardened wickedness of the German social democracy, a party that in times of peace pretended to be at the head of the world proletariat, which claimed to be instructing and leading the whole world, that had at least ten million followers of both sexes in its own country, and which for four years now, like a medieval mercenaries, at the behest of the ruling class twenty-four times a day, is nailing socialism to the cross." (*Rosa Luxemburg*, in *The Spartacus Letters* from September 1918, No. 11).

### THE FALSIFIED TESTAMENT

In 1918, I had many doubts about the October Revolution. Who didn't have them? Only the Bolsheviks, I think? Lenin, Trotsky and whole ranks of revolutionary Marxists in Russia, fighting the Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries, etc., vehemently demanded that the promised but still postponed National Legislative Assembly be convened, and when it was finally convened, they dispersed it with bayonets. Did they have no doubts about it beforehand, the same Bolsheviks who fought for the slogan of the Constitutional Assembly for almost twenty years? They always fought the petty-bourgeois, "Socialist-Revolutionary" solution to the agrarian question as strongly as possible – the division of land and the creation of peasant family farms, they always supported the generally accepted Marxist solution to the agrarian question – the nationalization of land – and after coming to power, they proclaimed the "Socialist-Revolutionary" solution. Did they do it without thinking, out of pure fantasy? They demanded unlimited democracy, absolute freedom of the press, etc. – and then obliterated all democratic gains. Was it all done completely uncritically, just like that, in an instant?

One can think about the problems of the Russian Revolution whatever one wants – one thing is certain: the old truth is confirmed in the revolution: in the beginning there was action. In other words, it is only a living stream of events, a rushing stream of revolution that raises to the surface, depending on the degree of development and maturity of human society, both formulas for solving historical problems and the means to do so. In peaceful times, traditional concepts can be flaunted – but the whirlwind of revolution swallows everyone with all their scruples. The meaning, character and form of the Russian revolution were given not by the basic decrees of the Bolsheviks—it was the revolution itself that dictated the laws with an iron necessity. This is the enormous value and sense of the new power and the new experiences that the October Revolution gave us.

We in Poland did not feel the impact of the violent events that in Russia forced Marxists to give up many traditional notions and provided them with new experiences. Likewise, the Paris Commune, which was, after all, an experience on a much smaller historical scale. It made Marx and Engels see in it the finally discovered form of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and at the same time changed their views on the question of running the state machine and on the form of democracy. We, Poles, were protected from the direct, lively impact of the rapidly growing and rushing ahead of each other events by the armored fist of the German occupation, which turned Poland into a desert and created an almost cemetery atmosphere threatening with spiritual death. So it was not easy for us to drown out scruples. How could it be otherwise with our comrades in Germany separated from the world by prison walls?

At the end of November or the beginning of December 1918, a German soldier brought me from Berlin to Warsaw a small piece of paper written in Polish from Rosa Luxemburg, in which, in response to my reports, she wrote:

"If our party (in Poland) is full of enthusiasm for Bolshevism and at the same time (in a secret pamphlet) speaks against the Bolshevik peace and against their agitation for the slogan of <<self-determination of nations>>, then this is enthusiasm combined with criticism – what else could we want? I shared all your doubts and reservations as well, but I gave them up in the most important matters, and in some of them I did not go as far as you. The terror has proven great weakness, that is for sure, but it is directed against internal enemies who base their hopes on the existence of capitalism outside Russia, and receive support and encouragement from it. When the European revolution takes place, the Russian counterrevolutionaries will lose not only support but also – more importantly – courage. The

Bolshevik terror is therefore, above all, an expression of the weakness of the European proletariat. Certainly—the existing agrarian relations constitute the most dangerous, painful point of the Russian revolution, but here too the truth is valid that even the greatest revolution can only realize what has matured in the course of development. This painful place, too, can only be healed by the European Revolution. And this one is coming!..."

This is what our great friend wrote to me then. Or maybe I was just dreaming?

Luise Kautsky, in her posthumous memoirs about Rosa Luxemburg, wrote that, immediately after her release from prison, where Bolshevik terror made her lose sleep through many nights, she devoted herself entirely to Bolshevism. Was she unjustifiably accusing her late friend of such a terrible crime, or was it just a dream?

At least it may seem so when one reads the introduction to Rosa Luxemburg's pamphlet, published by Dr. Paul Levi, *The Russian Revolution. A critical assessment*. - This brochure, which the author began to write in the summer of 1918 in prison, but which she could not finish, contains a sharp criticism of the Bolshevik tactics after the October Revolution, namely, it is directed against the dissolution of the National Assembly, against the abolition of democracy, freedom of the press and assembly, against terror, against the way the agrarian question is resolved. The publication of this unfinished pamphlet would certainly be an interesting biographical contribution to illustrate the spiritual struggle the author waged in the four walls of the prison cell, seeking to learn about the new problems of the revolution. But Paul Levi presents this pamphlet to his readers not as an episode of the author's spiritual struggle, but as the mature fruit of her thoughts, something like a political testament by Rosa Luxemburg. In "Mitteilungsblatt der KAG" of December 6, 1922, he even argues categorically:

"No, Rosa Luxemburg did not change her views on the tactics of the Bolsheviks until her death, and neither did Leo Jogiches. I am convinced that also Polish friends of Rosa Luxemburg, who thought like her, changed their views only many years after her death".

As far as Polish friends are concerned, we have a historical document: in December 1918, before the unification of the Polish social democracy and the PPS-Left into a communist party, we drafted a programmatic declaration, which we sent to Rosa Luxemburg and Leo Jogiches in Berlin for critical evaluation. None of them questioned a single word of this draft, and this printed

programmatic declaration, which directly referred to the Russian revolution, was communist, that is, it opposed a constitutional assembly, democracy, etc.

If, however, Paul Levi's claim were true, it would mean, to confine ourselves to two things only, that: from November 1918 until her death, Rosa Luxemburg, like the dependent Social Democrats, was for the convening of a National Assembly and for freedom of the press for counter-revolutionaries. If we assume that this pamphlet is in fact the author's political testament, and Paul Levi proclaimed himself "the political heir of Rosa Luxemburg" by publishing it, it follows that the publisher of this pamphlet was in favor of convening the National Assembly, etc., that the former chairman of the German Communist Party was getting ready to take over the role of Ebert in the new revolution, to fight for the new Weimar, that he therefore acted in the Communist Party as a masked Scheidemann. However, fortunately for Paul Levi, we have to say that his claim is not true. He was not a masked Scheidemann in the ranks of the communists, he fought against Weimar, against freedom of the press for Mensheviks. At the organizational congress of the KPD, he said like the Bolsheviks: "The way of the proletariat can only lead over the corpse of the National Assembly." In connection with the Berlin general strike in March 1919, he proudly told one of the party's representatives (The Caius pamphlet):

"Had the strike leadership expressed the revolutionary will of the masses, it would have crushed the counter-revolutionary press, including the knives-drawing <<Vorwärts>>, while the revolutionary press would not only be tolerated but supported through increased paper allocations."

Demands were made to suppress the counter-revolutionary press, although there was no bloody, armed civil war, no dictatorship of the proletariat.

That's what Levi said when he was still a communist. It was only after he had ceased to be a communist that he discovered Rosa Luxemburg's alleged political testament and hastily proclaimed himself her heir.

Let the facts speak for themselves.

## TERRORISM

There is no doubt that Rosa Luxemburg also later, after release from prison, came out against terror; characterized it as a specific instrument of the bourgeois revolution, and finally she said:

"In bourgeois revolutions, terror was a means of destroying historical illusions or defending hopeless interests against the current of history...

But the socialist proletariat, thanks to the theory of scientific socialism, proceeds to its revolution without any illusions... He undertakes a revolution not in order to pursue utopian illusions against the course of history, but in order to realize, on the basis of an iron mechanism of development, what is dictated by the historical moment: to make socialism a reality. The socialist proletariat is to fulfill its mission as the mass, as the overwhelming majority of working people. And therefore it does not need to destroy its own illusions with bloody acts of violence" ("Rote Fahne", 24 November 1918).

We still have the usual, traditional opposition between terror and mass, as we formulated it together with our Russian comrades against Russian and Polish terrorists in the times of the struggle against tsarism. Second, Rosa Luxemburg relies on the experiences of the great bourgeois revolutions, as she does in this pamphlet, where she invokes the same experiences to prove the necessity of a constitutional assembly. Later we will see how in the "Rote Fahne" she uses the same experiences to arrive at a fundamentally opposite view – namely, to be against a constitutional assembly. But, despite the problem of historical necessity and the role of terror in the initial stage of the dictatorship of the proletariat, it is necessary to state – which, it seems, Rosa Luxemburg did not realize at the time – that it was Lenin who, immediately after the October Revolution, and even today, emphasized with particular emphasis the impossibility of immediate liquidation of capitalism, the necessity, indeed, the usefulness of state capitalism, etc. under the conditions of the rule of the proletariat in the first transitional period of this reign – at least until the outbreak of the European revolution – and at the same time opted for the "Extraordinary Commission to Combat Counter-Revolution etc.". This proves that the Russian terror did not pursue such illusions as a "purely socialist" economy in an isolated, petty-bourgeois country, that the "Extraordinary Commission" in four terrible years, despite the fact that the European revolution did not happen, was to help Soviet Russia defend its existence – that Rosa Luxemburg could not have foreseen. Meanwhile, this fact is a great historical justification for "Chrezvychayka", although it does not prove that in a non-isolated revolution, such as the European one, terror as a temporary means of



struggle will be necessary. That the Bolsheviks do not succumb to illusions, at least not in the sense that Rosa Luxemburg and Marxist theory in general present illusion as the mother of terror (Lenin himself often fights with various illusions in his own ranks) was also known to Rosa Luxemburg when she admired and openly praised the bright and bold look of the Bolsheviks on every situation, as she does in this pamphlet.

However, anyone who carefully reads the article by Rosa Luxemburg in "Rote Fahne" and her subsequent publications, cited by us, and the relevant places in the pamphlet *What does the Spartacus League want?*, and who understands the contemporary situation and the then present tasks of German revolution, will quickly see that Rosa Luxemburg was not writing about terror—in Russia. She always fought with the visor raised and was not in the habit of arguing with an imaginary opponent. The more so because in *The Spartacus Letters* she openly criticized the tactics of the Bolsheviks on another point. Her attack was aimed then at quite different enemies.

Rosa Luxemburg with her sharp mind already then – in November 1918! – predicted the future terror of Noske-Scheidemann, their preparations for a provocative putsch in order to bloody crush the revolution. In such a situation, perhaps only "pink" petty-bourgeois intellectuals could argue about the future terror in the future Soviet Germany, and the Hilferdings' specialty became to curse revolutionary terror in Russia, while saddling the Ebert-Scheidemann government, and to watch without a fight the preparations for Noske's bloody orgies of terror, indeed, staying in this government after December 6 – despite the first manifestations of the counter-revolutionary terror of traitors Ebert-Scheidemann!

But Rosa Luxemburg already saw the terror. And the imperative of the moment for her was – not to discuss the terror in the Soviet republic, but to fiercely fight the impending terror of Scheidemann-Noske and awake the masses to action.

For in that article, Rosa Luxemburg writes:

"There is, however, someone else who today urgently needs terror, violence, anarchy: it is gentlemen *bourgeois*, it is all the parasites of the capitalist economy that tremble for their property and privileges, for their income and the right to rule...

The brain and heart of the present campaign against the revolutionary leaders of the proletariat is capital and its struggle for existence. Its hand and tool is the dependent social democracy...

Dependent commandant of Berlin arms security guards with live rounds against imagined attacks by Spartacists. Satellites of Wels and co. stir up the darkest elements among soldiers against Liebknecht and his friends. They keep drowning us with letters full of threats and warnings...

What would one think of what the masses of the revolutionary proletarians would do if the campaign had achieved its goal, if a hair were to fall off the head of the one whom they had lifted from prison in their hands and recognized as their appointed leader? Who would then be able to tell the masses about the need to keep a cool head?..."

But her ideas on struggle after the conquest of power by the proletariat go much further. In the draft program she wrote (*What does the Spartacus League want?*), we read:

"The proletarian revolution does not need terror for its ends, it hates and abhors murder."

However, there comes the resistance of counter-revolution and Rosa Luxemburg points to the most important weapon:

"This resistance must be broken step by step with an iron hand and with ruthless energy. The violence of the bourgeois counterrevolution must be opposed with the revolutionary violence of the proletariat, attacks, conspiracies, and the wiles of the bourgeoisie with the indomitable consistency, vigilance and the ever-increasing activity of the proletarian mass, the looming danger of counter-revolution with arming of the people and disarming of the ruling classes... by concentrated, cohesive, maximally multiplied power of the working class..."

The masses assume the main burden of the fight against the counter-revolution. But how can the masses, after the proletariat has conquered the state power, fight against all attacks, all conspiracies, and all deceptions? If, as it was in isolated Russia, attacks, deceptions and conspiracies take place almost every day – the entire imperialist world is tirelessly making sure of that – the masses could not stand at the workshops for even an hour, but would have to search tirelessly for the enemy after all streets and roads, the proletarian state power would have no other form of concentrated,

cohesive, maximally multiplied power of the working class at its disposal, except the constant combat readiness of the entire armed force. Rosa Luxemburg, of course, also knew this well, and therefore demanded in the program, in addition to "arming all adult male proletarians as workers militia", also "the creation of a proletarian Red Guard as an active *part* of the militia in order to constantly protect the revolution from anti-revolutionary attacks and conspiracies."

We see that she puts in the first place the question of "the constant readiness of the proletarian mass." This is the most important thing, this is the basic principle of revolutionary tactics. If, in the class struggles, before the seizure of power, the working masses resort to collectively leaving the workshops to wage the relentless struggle against the counter-revolution in the streets, it is these continuous strikes and this widely developed mass struggle that could undermine the capitalist system, and therefore bring only benefit to the revolution. However, since the proletarian state power does not need and cannot engage masses as a whole in the struggle against every anti-revolutionary cabal, conspiracy, etc., their place is only taken by an "active *part* as a Red Guard". This thought, however, has its logical consequences. If it is not always necessary to activate the entire mass, but only a part of it, then it is clear that under certain circumstances not all of the Red Guards are needed to neutralize the machinations of the Scheidemanns: sometimes a few Red Guards - Chekists will suffice. Since this was no longer a principal question, but practical one, dependant on the circumstances, Rosa Luxemburg did not need to draw these consequences. What was necessary and essential about this, she said with all clarity and sharpness. And the Bolsheviks said no more when they came to power. Nor did they do anything more than bring the masses into battle in general, and then the Red Guards as well. It was only when German imperialism, on the one hand, and the imperialism of the Entente along with the Czechoslovaks on the other, supported by the German Social Democrats, threatened to strangle the Russian Revolution, that the Bolsheviks resorted to both increased mass activity and terror.

Rosa Luxemburg used the traditional juxtaposition: masses - terror, because she was primarily concerned with the struggle of the masses and did not know the experiences of the Russian Revolution. This is evidenced by her pamphlet, in which she expresses her firm conviction that the masses of peasants, satisfied in their demands by division of land, will not be concerned about the revolution, leaving it to its fate. We know it was the other way around, but Rosa Luxemburg could not have known that then. This is evidenced by an alarmist article written by her in August or September 1918 for "The Spartacus Letters", in which she expresses her painful – completely unjustified – as we know today – fears that the Bolsheviks, abandoned by the masses, could

conclude a forced alliance with German imperialism. To prevent this from happening, she appealed to the German masses.

It is known that as a result of the war with the whole world and on all fronts, as a result of the resulting economic ruin and the dispersion of workers, the bond of the ruling Bolshevik party with the masses was loosened at the beginning of 1921. But the Bolsheviks themselves also sounded the alarm because of this. For for them the struggle of the masses is a matter of life and death; not only the fight of the trained soldier, but also of the conscious mass of the Red Army, as well as the working masses in general, which the Bolsheviks constantly strive to imbue with a living spirit of clarity of purpose, class consciousness, and vigilance. And in this respect, the Bolsheviks are doing what no revolutionary government has yet dared to do, which also the Mensheviks before the October Revolution have not dared to do, despite democracy, freedom of the press, etc.; they speak openly with the masses and expose to the masses the illusions and mistakes that they have committed as the ruling party. This fact speaks for itself!

The experiences that Rosa Luxemburg did not make have made the traditional opposition between the masses and terrorism obsolete in relation to the Russian revolution.

## DEMOCRACY

Dread and terror are phenomena that naturally accompany every external and civil war. What is terror? Formally speaking, terror is the use of violence, arrests, and executions. Politically, it means abolishing the most important democratic rights and guarantees in public life. Thus, the problem of terror as a special phenomenon is connected with the whole complex of problems of democracy with which it is inextricably linked during the civil war and in a certain period of the dictatorship of the proletariat, namely with the question of the constitutional assembly (parliamentarism), general elections, freedom of press, of assembly, etc. And it is only in this context that Rosa Luxemburg criticizes the Bolshevik terror. As she condemns the destruction of the democratic guarantees of constitutional assembly, general elections, freedom of press and assembly, she also condemns terror.

But it is precisely on all these issues, i.e. the most important issues of communist tactics, that Rosa Luxemburg completely changed her mind after the outbreak of the revolution. If she had not done so, she would have been among the "Independents" and on the right wing of the party at that. For it is not the attitude to terror that characterizes the communist tactics. The governments of

Scheidemann-Noske, Horthy etc. also used terror. The attitude to the problems mentioned above determines the division into communist and other parties.

Speaking against the dissolution of the constitutional assembly in her pamphlet, the author reaches the following conclusion:

"Councils as the backbone as well as constitutional assembly and universal suffrage."

This was the opinion of Rosa Luxemburg in the summer of 1918. But the same was the opinion of the Bolsheviks at the beginning of that year! After coming to power, they calmly prepared and successfully convened a constitutional assembly on the basis of universal suffrage, and later, after revealing a clear contradiction in the existing system of relations, it was abolished by dissolution of the assembly.

A significant thing: since the Russian February Revolution, the imperialist press, in particular the French press, shouted that councils and parliament were absurd, and demanded, starting from their assumptions, the abolition of this duality by the liquidation of councils. But the Bolsheviks until December 1918 and Rosa Luxemburg until the outbreak of the German November Revolution did not see this rift. The Bolsheviks demanded "all power" for the councils, and Rosa Luxemburg enthusiastically echoed them in both her pamphlet and *The Spartacus Letters*. But "all power" means both the executive and the legislature. So what was left for the National Constitutional Assembly, which was after all conceived as a legislative body and only as such came into question?

It is also significant that, although we have all read Marx's *The Civil War* and various statements by Marx and Engels on the experience of the Paris Commune, containing valuable directions on this subject, we have forgotten – both Trotsky in the work *From the October Revolution to the Peace of Brest-Litovsk* and Rosa Luxemburg in her *Critical praise* for the October Revolution – precisely about what our old masters wrote about the abolition of the division between the legislative and executive powers after the seizure of power by the proletariat.

The councils and the constituent assembly – this was the thought that the Bolsheviks adhered to until January, Rosa Luxemburg until November 1918, and the Independents still during the revolution. This meant, however, the preservation of the well-established division between the legislative and executive powers, and therefore of a characteristic feature of the bourgeois

parliamentary state in general. When Marx and Engels wrote in 1872, on the basis of the experience of the Paris Commune, that "the working class cannot simply take possession of a ready-made state machine and set it in motion for its own ends," they meant not only the destruction of the bourgeois form of the state, but in addition, that there are new, proletarian state forms to be created by the Paris Commune. These new forms are mentioned by Engels in the preface to Marx's *The Civil War* in 1891, in which he writes:

“This shattering of the former state power and its replacement by a new and really democratic state is described in detail in the third section of *The Civil War*.”

And in that section we read:

“The Commune was to be a working, not a parliamentary body, executive and legislative at the same time...”

In a rough sketch of national organization, which the Commune had no time to develop, it states clearly that the Commune was to be the political form of even the smallest country hamlet... The rural communities of every district were to administer their common affairs by an assembly of delegates in the central town, and these district assemblies were again to send deputies to the National Delegation in Paris...”

Two conclusions follow from the above: first, the commune system was not to be a democracy in the ordinary sense of the word. Not direct, but three-stage elections: commune, district, capital. If the Bolsheviks introduced just such elections, based on the principles of the commune, instead of direct elections to the constitutional assembly, the Social Democrats would have declared them as opponents of democracy. For Marx and Engels, it was, despite this restriction of the electoral law, "a new and really democratic state power".

Secondly, the Commune was to be "at the same time an executive and a legislative body," so again not democracy in the social-democratic and petty-bourgeois sense or in the sense of bourgeois science of the state in general, but democracy, in which there was no place for "councils and a constitutional assembly", for the separation of powers into the executive and legislative ones.

And this was what Marx called "the political form at last discovered under which to work out the economical emancipation of labor" or, as Engels said in 1891, "That was the Dictatorship of the Proletariat."

Let us now substitute for the Commune – councils with their direct elections, abolition of parliamentarism, amalgamation of the legislative and executive powers, and we will have a system of councils - "at last discovered" - on the basis of the experiences of the Russian Revolution and the first steps of the proletarian revolution in Germany, etc. - the political form of dictatorship the proletariat.

## CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY

But when the Bolsheviks, only after passing through the petty-bourgeois-Menshevik stage of the revolution and after gaining power, discovered a contradiction in the formula of "councils and a constitutional assembly", Rosa Luxemburg, thanks to the Russian experience and in glaring contradiction to her own criticism, was able from the very beginning of the German Revolution to come out *against* the National Constitutional Assembly as harshly as she argued for it in her pamphlet.

In the pamphlet, she wrote:

“According to Trotsky’s theory, every elected assembly reflects once and for all only the mental composition, political maturity and mood of its electorate just at the moment when the latter goes to the polling place. According to that, a democratic body is the reflection of the masses at the end of the electoral period, much as the heavens of Herschel always show us the heavenly bodies not as they are when we are looking at them but as they were at the moment they sent out their light-messages to the earth from the measureless distances of space. Any living mental connection between the representatives, once they have been elected, and the electorate, any permanent interaction between one and the other, is hereby denied.

Yet how all historical experience contradicts this! Experience demonstrates quite the contrary: namely, that the living fluid of the popular mood continuously flows around the living fluid of the popular mood continuously flows around the representative bodies,

penetrates them, guides them. How else would it be possible to witness, as we do at times in every bourgeois parliament, the amusing capers of the <<people's representatives>>, who are suddenly inspired by a new "spirit" and give forth quite unexpected sounds; or to find the most dried-out mummies at times comporting themselves like youngsters and the most diverse little *Scheidemännchen* suddenly finding revolutionary tones in their breasts – whenever there is rumbling in factories and workshops on the street.

And is this ever-living influence of the mood and degree of political ripeness of the masses upon the elected bodies to be renounced in favor of a rigid scheme of party emblems and tickets in the very midst of revolution? Quite the contrary! It is precisely the revolution which creates by its glowing heat that delicate, vibrant, sensitive political atmosphere in which the waves of popular feeling, the pulse of popular life, work for moment on the representative bodies in most wonderful fashion. It is on this very fact, to be sure, that the well-known moving scenes depend which invariably present themselves in the first stages of every revolution, scenes in which old reactionaries or extreme moderates, who have issued out of a parliamentary election by limited suffrage under the old regime, suddenly become the heroic and stormy spokesmen of the uprising. The classic example is provided by the famous <<Long Parliament>> in England, which was elected and assembled 1642 and remained at its post for seven whole years and reflected in its internal life all alterations and displacements of popular feeling, of political ripeness, of class differentiation, of the progress of the revolution to its highest point, from the initial devout skirmishes with the Crown under a Speaker who remains on his knees, to the abolition of the House of Lords, the execution of Charles and the proclamation of the republic.

And was not the same wonderful transformation repeated in the French Estates-General, in the censorship-subjected parliament of Louis Phillipe, and even – and this last, most striking example was very close to Trotsky – even in the Fourth Russian Duma which, elected in the Year of Grace 1909 under the most rigid rule of the counter-revolution, suddenly felt the glowing heat of the impending overturn and became the point of departure for the revolution?

All this shows that <<the cumbersome mechanism of democratic institutions>> possesses a powerful corrective – namely, the living movement of the masses, their unending pressure. And the more democratic the institutions, the livelier and stronger the pulse-beat of the



political life of the masses, the more direct and complete is their influence – despite rigid party banners, outgrown tickets (electoral lists), etc. To be sure, every democratic institution has its limits and shortcomings, things which it doubtless shares with all other human institutions. But the remedy which Trotsky and Lenin have found, the elimination of democracy as such, is worse than the disease it is supposed to cure; for it stops up the very living source from which alone can come correction of all the innate shortcomings of social institutions. That source is the active, untrammelled, energetic political life of the broadest masses of the people.”

As we can see, Rosa Luxemburg, when still in prison in the summer of 1918, based her views on the experiences of bourgeois revolutions. Like the Bolsheviks in 1917, she looked at future development only through democratic glasses, and did not yet perceive the essential difference between the course and the internal consequences of bourgeois and proletarian revolutions. But when she plunged into the vortex of the German Revolution, she discovered in the living, rapid torrent of events what she could not capture from a distance and from Trotsky's pamphlet itself. And in November 1918 she wrote:

“What is gained, then, with this cowardly detour called the National Assembly? The bourgeoisie's position is strengthened; the proletariat is weakened and confused by empty illusions; time and energy are dissipated and lost in ‘discussions’ between the wolf and the lamb; in a word, one plays into the hands of all those elements whose intent is to defraud the proletarian revolution of its socialist goals and to emasculate it into a bourgeois democratic revolution.

But the question of the National Assembly is not a question of opportunity, not a question of the greater <<convenience>>. It is *a question of principle, a question of the socialists' knowledge of themselves and of the limitations of the revolution.*

The first decisive step in the great French Revolution was taken in July 1789, when the three separate Estates combined in a joint National Assembly. This decision left its stamp upon the whole future course of events; it was the symbol of the victory of a new bourgeois social order over the medieval-feudal society of Estates.

In the same way, the symbol of the new socialist social order borne by the present proletarian revolution, the symbol of the class character of its true task, and of the class character of the political organ which is meant to execute this task, is: the workers' council, based on representation of the urban and rural proletariat.

The National Assembly is an outmoded legacy of bourgeois revolutions, an empty shell, a requisite from the time of petit-bourgeois illusions of a <<united people>> and of the <<liberty, equality, fraternity>> of the bourgeois State. To resort to the National Assembly today is consciously or unconsciously to turn the revolution back to the historical stage of bourgeois revolutions; anyone advocating it is a secret agent of the bourgeoisie or an unconscious spokesman of petit-bourgeois ideology...

The convocation of such a representative body of labour (a national council of the urban and rural proletarians) in place of the traditional National Assembly of the bourgeois revolutions is in itself an act of the class struggle, *a break with the historical past of bourgeois society*". ("Rote Fahne", November 20, 1918)<sup>2</sup>

Contrary to the view expressed in the pamphlet, she sees from the very beginning of the revolution the real, anti-revolutionary meaning of the constitutional assembly, and already in the third issue of the "Rote Fahne" she writes about the government:

"... It convenes the National Constitutional Assembly, thus creates the bourgeois counterbalance to the representation of workers and soldiers, and thus shifts the revolution onto the path of a bourgeois revolution, blurs the socialist goals of the revolution".

From the flood of similar sentences, we will cite just a few more:

"On this issue (of the National Assembly), as on all others, only two positions are possible. Either you want the National Assembly as a means of overpowering the proletariat, paralyzing its class energy, obfuscating its ultimate socialist goals, or you want to hand over all power to the proletariat, expand the revolution that has begun into a powerful class struggle for a socialist social system and to this end establish a political rule of great masses of working people, dictatorship of workers 'and soldiers' councils. For socialism or against

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2 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/11/20.htm>

socialism, against or for the National Assembly, there is no third option. " ("Rote Fahne", November 29, 1918).

From the convening Central Council, Rosa Luxemburg demands decisions, one of which is:

"It must reject the National Assembly as an attack on the revolution and the workers' and soldiers' councils." ("Rote Fahne", December 15, 1918).

## FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

Not every reader can get hold of the "Rote Fahne" from the period from November 1918 until Rosa Luxemburg's death to see her views on the constitutional assembly in the proletarian revolution, but it is enough to pick up her excellent work *What does the Spartacus League wants?* to learn what position she actually occupied. And if she has fundamentally changed her views on this most important fundamental tactical question, if she has abandoned the democratic guarantees of civil liberty, the National Assembly, and with it universal direct elections, as an unnecessary and harmful weapon for the proletarian revolution, then it is natural to conclude that she had to also cease recognizing other guarantees such as freedom of the press and assembly. And indeed, she wrote about it as well.

In an article about a mass demonstration on Victory Avenue, in which she praised "this adamant revolutionary conviction, this magnificent mood, this energy that the masses exuded", Rosa Luxemburg states: "Politically the proletarians have grown enormously through their experience of recent weeks, in the latest events." And what was this "enormous political development", this "adamant revolutionary conviction"? The depriving the opponent of the freedom of the press. She wrote:

"The masses enthusiastically followed the appeal of their leaders; spontaneously and on their own strength they brought about the reappointment of Eichhorn. On their own spontaneous initiative they occupied <<Vorwärts>> and seized the bourgeois editors and the W.T.B." etc. ("Rote Fahne", January 7, 1919).<sup>3</sup>

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3 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1919/01/07.htm>

And how two days later she mocked the petty-bourgeois-democratic howling because of "the attacks of the masses, their trespassing on three times sacred private property, namely on the laboratories of the spiritual poisoning of the wells, the bourgeois editorial offices of newspapers." Press freedom for the Mensheviks? She wrote:

"But what have we experienced during these three days? All the positions that were won: the recapture of the police presidency, the seizure of <<Vorwärts>>, the seizure of the WTB and the bourgeois editorial offices, all of this was the spontaneous work of the masses. What did the people who stood or pretended to stand at the head of the masses in those days: the revolutionary chairmen and the Central Board of the USP in Berlin? They disregarded the most elementary rules of revolutionary action. For:

When the masses capture <<Vorwärts>>, then it is the duty of the revolutionary chairmen and the Central Board of the USP in Greater Berlin, who, after all, officially claim to be representatives of the Berlin workers, to ensure that the editorial board is immediately led in the spirit of the revolutionary workers of Berlin. Where were the editors? What did Däumig, Ledebour do, those journalists by profession and vocation, who now as the left of the USP do not have any organ at all, why have they failed the masses? Was <<governance>> more urgent than action?"

So: capturing <<Vorwärts>>, bourgeois editorial offices – these were the "positions" that were "won" by the revolution; it was the duty of the revolutionaries, or those who wanted to represent the revolution, not to return <<Vorwärts>> and other newspapers to the dependent Social Democrats, democrats or republicans – that is, not to restore the freedom of the press, the "free" struggle of views – but to staff them with revolutionary journalists. Failure to do so meant that the confidence of the revolutionary masses had been betrayed.

Yes, the first step Rosa Luxemburg took in the revolutionary days after November 9 was her work at the editorial table in <<Lokalanzeiger>> atop the ruins of press freedom.

And the last article she wrote before her death, *Order prevails in Berlin*, her last breath concerns, among other things, the fight against freedom of the press for enemies during revolution. She wrote:

“It is a demonstration of the healthy instinct and fresh inner strength of the Berlin proletariat that it was not appeased by the reinstatement of Eichorn (which it had demanded), rather the proletariat spontaneously occupied the command posts of the counter-revolution: the bourgeois press, the semi-official press agency, the <<Vorwärts>> office.”<sup>4</sup>

This was the revolutionary activity of Rosa Luxemburg from her first appearance after November 9 until her last breath. Could she perform this activity with the views she expressed in her pamphlet?

For some eclectic, it would probably be possible. After all, here and there were Independent Social Democrats who tried, in spite of all emerging contradictions, to prepare such an eclectic mush, to throw the proletarian dictatorship and the National Assembly into one pot, to "anchor" the system of councils in the bourgeois system, to melt the basic idea of socialism and the basic idea of capitalism in one melting pot.

But what comes so easily to others is impossible for Rosa Luxemburg, whose mind Franz Mehring considered the most brilliant among Marx's disciples. Before she thrown itself into the turbulent waves of the proletarian revolution, she had to review all the great experiences and teachings of bourgeois revolutions, which until recently were our only teachers on these matters, to re-examine the regularities of their course, to counterpose them to the Russian Revolution<sup>5</sup>, to measure and test the latter with the scale of the great bourgeois past. She did so, as always, in keeping with her revolutionary way of thinking, in such a sharply critical manner that there was a contradiction between acknowledging the October Revolution and condemning its essential characteristics. After that, however, she had to break the taut thread, to finally break with the old world and its great revolutionary traditions, which had so long disturbed Lenin's course of thought in the course of the turbulent events of the revolution, bind again the opposite ends of the broken thread, and only thus spiritually enter the new world.

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4 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1919/01/14.htm>

5 Rosa Luxemburg also sharply criticizes in her pamphlet the slogan of "self-determination of nations" that the Bolsheviks threw into the capitalist world. We will not, however, deal more closely with this matter here. First of all, the communists in Poland have repeatedly questioned this slogan, without giving up the strictest possible solidarity with the Bolsheviks. Many Russian comrades also opposed this slogan, continuing to be Bolsheviks. Secondly, it was also the slogan of the Russian Mensheviks, at least in theory, indeed, it figured and is on the banner of the bourgeois pacifists and Scheidemanns of all countries, albeit only as a means of deceiving the world. The slogan by which it is also possible to pursue a bourgeois, anti-revolutionary policy is not the tactical lever of the revolution. The self-determination of peoples can only become a reality in a socialist world, never in a bourgeois world; but then also not as an expression of an abstract, metaphysical law, but within the framework of international proletarian solidarity, which aims to build a socialist world economy.

After November 9, Rosa Luxemburg takes up the criticism again. But this time she no longer measures the proletarian revolution with the scale of the bourgeois revolutions, but vice versa. And despite the enormous tension of the tireless struggle her revolutionary-dialectical mind led her to the fundamental conclusion that the laws of bourgeois revolutions do not apply in proletarian revolution, that their paths differ as much, as does their class content.

And after November 9, she praised what she condemned in her pamphlet.

#### THE BOLSHEVIK SLOGAN ON THE AGRARIAN QUESTION BEFORE THE OCTOBER REVOLUTION

The peasant struggle against latifundism was the most powerful lever of the Russian Revolution. But at the same time, the agrarian question was economically the most complicated and difficult one, and after its provisional resolution in the October Revolution, it always created the greatest difficulties in the development of soviet power.

90 percent of all the land taken from the landlords was distributed among the peasants. But this meant the transformation of large farms into small peasant farms, and therefore did not lead directly to the preparation of the first steps that would initiate a future socialist economy. For the latter means: the elimination of the opposition and separation between town and country, unification of the national economy, which also entails the socialization of the organization of the agricultural economy. This, however, is opposed by small peasant farms.

Rosa Luxemburg wrote about this in her pamphlet:

“That the Soviet government in Russia has not carried through these mighty reforms – who can reproach them for that! It would be a sorry jest indeed to demand or expect of Lenin and his comrades that, in the brief period of their rule, in the center of the gripping whirlpool of domestic and foreign struggles, ringed about by countless foes and opponents – to expect that under such circumstances they should already have solved, or even tackled, one of the most difficult tasks, indeed, we can safely say, the most difficult task of the socialist transformation of society! Even in the West, under the most favorable conditions, once we have come to power, we too will break many a tooth on this hard nut before we are out of the worst of the thousands of complicated difficulties of this gigantic task!

A socialist government which has come to power must in any event do one thing: it must take measures which lead *in the direction* of that fundamental prerequisite for a later socialist reform of agriculture; it must at least avoid everything which may bar the way to those measures.

Now the slogan launched by the Bolsheviks, immediate seizure and distribution of the land by the peasants, necessarily tended in the opposite direction. Not only is it not a socialist measure; it even cuts off the way to such measures; it piles up insurmountable obstacles to the socialist transformation of agrarian agriculture.

The seizure of the landed estates by the peasants according to the short and precise slogan of Lenin and his friends – <<Go and take the land for yourselves>> – simply led to the sudden, chaotic conversion of large landownership into peasant landownership. What was created is not social property but a new form of private property, namely, the breaking up of large estates into medium and small estates, or relatively advanced large units of production into primitive small units which operate with technical means from the time of the Pharaohs.

Nor is that all! Through these measures and the chaotic and purely arbitrary manner of their execution, differentiation in landed property, far from being eliminated, was even further sharpened. Although the Bolsheviks called upon the peasantry to form peasant committees so that the seizure of the nobles' estates might, in some fashion, be made into a collective act, yet it is clear that this general advice could not change anything in the real practice and real relations of power on the land. With or without committees, it was the rich peasants and usurers who made up the village bourgeoisie possessing the actual power in the hands in every Russian village, that surely became the chief beneficiaries of the agrarian revolution. Without being there to see, any one can figure out for himself that in the course of the distribution of the land, social and economic inequality among the peasants was not eliminated but rather increased, and that class antagonisms were further sharpened. The shift of power, however, took place to the disadvantage of the interests of the proletariat and of socialism. Formerly, there was only a small caste of noble and capitalist landed proprietors and a small minority of rich village bourgeoisie to oppose a socialist reform on the land. And their expropriation by a revolutionary mass movement of the people is mere child's play. But now, after the <<seizure>>, as an opponent of any attempt at socialization of agrarian

production, there is an enormous, newly developed and powerful mass of owning peasants who will defend their newly won property with tooth and nail against every attack. The question of the future socialization of agrarian economy – that is, any socialization of production in general in Russia – has now become a question of opposition and of struggle between the urban proletariat and the mass of the peasantry.”<sup>6</sup>

So much for Rosa Luxemburg. Here it must be emphasized: the last sentence about the emergence of a strong mass of peasants as the mass bearer of capitalism, in comparison with which the resistance of a small caste of landowners and a negligible minority of the rural bourgeoisie was a trivial matter – this thought, this statement, was repeatedly sharply made by Lenin in 1918, and especially since March 1921, including at the Third Congress of the Communist International.

But how did it come about? Already at the beginning of our considerations, we noted that the Bolsheviks supported the nationalization of the land. And on May 22, 1917, at the All-Russian Congress of Peasant Delegates, Lenin said, among other things:

“In advocating the immediate transfer, without payment, of the landed estates to the local peasants we do not by any means advocate the seizure of those estates as private property, we do not by any means advocate the division of those estates. We believe the land should be taken by the local peasantry for one sowing in accordance with a decision adopted by the majority of local peasant deputies.”<sup>7</sup>

“I and my Party comrades, in whose name I have the honour to speak, know of only two ways of protecting the interests of agricultural labourers and poor peasants, and we recommend these two ways to the Peasants’ Soviet for its attention.

The first way is to organise the agricultural labourers and poor peasants...

The second step which our Party recommends is that every big economy, for example, every big landed estate, of which there are 30,000 in Russia, should be organised as soon as possible into a model farm for the *common* cultivation of the land jointly by agricultural labourers and scientifically trained agronomists, using the animals, implements, etc., of the landowner for that purpose. Without this *common* cultivation under the direction of the

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6 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/ch02.htm>

7 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/congpeas/22.htm>



Soviets of Agricultural Labourers the land will not go entirely to the *working people*. To be sure, joint cultivation is a difficult business and it would be madness of course for anybody to imagine that joint cultivation of the land can be decreed from above and imposed on people, because the centuries-old habit of farming on one's own cannot suddenly disappear, and because money will be needed for it and adaptation to the new mode of life. If this advice, this view, on the common cultivation of the land with commonly owned animals and implements to be used to the best purpose jointly with agronomists—if this advice were the invention of individual political parties, the case would be a bad one, because changes are not made in the life of a people on the advice of a party, because tens of millions of people do not make a revolution on the advice of a party, and such a change would be much more of a revolution than the overthrow of the weak-minded Nicholas Romanov. I repeat, tens of millions of people will not make a revolution to order, but will do so when driven to it by dire need, when their position is an impossible one, when the joint pressure and determination of tens of millions of people break down the old barriers and are actually capable of creating a new way of life. When we advise such a measure, and advise caution in the handling of it, saying that it is becoming necessary, we are not drawing that conclusion from our programme, from our socialist doctrine alone, but because we, as socialists, have come to this conclusion by studying the life of the West-European nations. We know... that in America in 1865... hundreds of millions of dessiatines of land were distributed among the peasantry for nothing or next to nothing, and nevertheless capitalism dominates there more than anywhere else and oppresses the mass of the working people as badly as, if not worse than, in other countries. This is the socialist teaching, this is our study of other nations that firmly convinces us that without the common cultivation of the land by agricultural labourers using the best machinery and guided by scientifically trained agronomists there is no escape from the yoke of capitalism... The dire need I speak of is precisely this—we cannot continue farming in the old way. If we continue as before on our small isolated farms, albeit as free citizens on free soil, we are still faced with imminent ruin, for the debacle is drawing nearer day by day, hour by hour.”<sup>8</sup>

This is how, in a popular way, Lenin tried to explain to the assembled peasants the socialist doctrine, to clearly show them the advantages and the necessity of large scale enterprises. In this spirit, the Bolshevik party conference in April 1917 adopted a resolution on the agrarian question, the last point of which was formulated as follows:

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8 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/congpeas/22.htm>

“The party of the proletariat must advise the rural proletarians and semi-proletarians to strive to convert every landed estate into a fair-sized model farm to be run on public lines by the Soviets of Agricultural Labourers’ Deputies under the direction of agricultural experts and with the application of the best technique.”<sup>9</sup>

This is what the Bolsheviks wanted, two months before the October Revolution. But it turned out otherwise. Why?

## THE PRESSURE OF PEASANT MASSES

The reader may have noticed that in the passages of his speech to peasants quoted by us, Lenin referred to the "common cultivation" of large land areas as "a difficult business", because "because the centuries-old habit of farming on one's own cannot suddenly disappear". To farm workers and Western European peasants this sentence would probably seem ridiculous! For workers who have worked for many years on large and medium-sized farms and can quite easily get to know the entire, relatively even process of economic development, as well as the entire apparatus of the farm – unlike in large industrial enterprises – could easily farm further and without the landlords, at least in the old fashion, without technical innovation, and especially under the guidance of agronomists, etc., as Lenin demanded. However, in Great Russia proper, though there were landowners, there were relatively few large farms. Landowners leased land to peasants who cultivated their leased plots in the peasant-Russian way, "with technical means from the time of the Pharaohs". Thus, the large and medium-sized farm was a fairly little-known phenomenon for the mass of Russian farm workers and semi-proletarians, and this explains the great difficulty which Lenin foresaw. Labor relations in Russian agriculture – unlike modern relations in the industrial centers of Russia – have not yet taken on developed capitalist forms. This fact partially explains why things happened differently than the Bolsheviks wanted. Events took such a turn that they were stronger than the unbending, iron will of Lenin and his experienced party. The peasant mass spoke up for itself.

In the article *From a Publicist's Diary*, Lenin criticizes the "classic program", which was published in the form of an article in the *Izvestia of the All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies* on August 19, 1917 – a program formulated on the basis of 242 mandates that the field delegates handed over to the All-Russia Congress of Peasants' Deputies in 1917.

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9 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/7thconf/29.htm#v24zz99h-290-GUESS>

These "mandates", which perhaps can be compared to the "Cahiers des Deléances" of the Great French Revolution, contain very radical political demands of the peasantry most closely resembling the Bolshevik program, and demands on the agricultural question which Lenin presents as follows:

“According to the summary, the peasant land demands are primarily abolition of private ownership of all types of land, including the peasants’ lands, without compensation; transfer of lands on which high-standard scientific farming is practised to the state or the communes; confiscation of all livestock and implements on the confiscated lands (peasants with little land are excluded) and their transfer to the state or the communes; a ban on wage-labour; equalised distribution of land among the working people, with periodical redistributions, and so on. In the transition period, pending the convocation of the Constituent Assembly, the peasants demand the *immediate* enactment of laws prohibiting the purchase and sale of land, abolition of laws concerning separation from the commune, farmsteads, etc., laws protecting forests, fisheries, etc., abolishing long-term and revising short-term leases, and so on.”<sup>10</sup>

At first glance, it is clear that the above demands could only be implemented against the capitalists, and therefore also against the Socialist Revolutionaries and Mensheviks who went along with the capitalists. It was a powerful, unrestrained current that could only find its outlet in the October Revolution. And the same demands of the poor peasants, which Lenin criticized in August 1917, on October 26 (November 7) of the same year were covered by Lenin's Decree on Land.

“... what Engels said on the peasant question shortly before his death. He stressed that socialists have no intention whatever of expropriating the small peasants, and that the advantages of mechanised socialist agriculture will be made clear to them only *by force of example*...

The peasants want to keep their small farms, to set equal standards for all, and to make readjustments on an equalitarian basis from time to time. Fine. No sensible socialist will differ with the peasant poor over this. If the land is confiscated, that *means* the domination of the banks has been undermined, if the implements are confiscated, that *means* the domination of capital has been undermined—and in that case, *provided the proletariat rules*

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10 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/sep/11.htm>

centrally, provided political power is taken over by the proletariat, the rest will come by itself, as a result of <<force of example>>, prompted by experience.”<sup>11</sup>

And immediately after seizing power, the Bolsheviks opened the field for the "force of example" to operate. They established agricultural communes (by combining small peasant farms into common large farms). According to the data of W. P. Milutin (*Sozialismus und Landwirtschaft*, 1919), in a year and a half, almost 6,000 communes were established in Soviet Russia, covering about one million dessiatins (dessiatin = 1.09 ha) of land. Initially, communes were created almost exclusively on former latifundias, established by workers and landless peasants. But now communes are also starting to appear on peasant lands, and also small farmers and middle-class farmers are joining them...

There are also Soviet farms, large farms established directly after the October Revolution, most closely bound to industry. In 1919, they included one and a half million dessiatins.

But what can "force of example" do without livestock and tools, without machinery, fertilizers, and seeds? How could "force of example" radiate, how could new countless Soviet farms be established with the general ruin of the Soviet economy, when even new factories could not be built and existing ones had to stop working? With the progressing disorganization of the entire economy, Soviet farms and communes also had to decline and collapse. However, the fact that the Soviet government was prepared to lease large land areas to foreign capitalists to build modern agriculture on them proves that there is still plenty of room for a socialist example. Thus, the October Decree on Land would not have been an insurmountable obstacle to building socialist agriculture in Russia if the Russian Revolution had not remained isolated.

## THE POSITION OF THE COMMUNIST INTERNATIONAL ON THE AGRARIAN QUESTION

But even so, Rosa Luxemburg's criticism of the Bolshevik solution to the agrarian question, as well as in many other points, turns out to be at all questionable when it is considered that due to the obvious ignorance of the real state of affairs, which was inevitable in prison conditions, she claims that the Bolsheviks present their every tactical step to the international proletariat as a model for imitation. So she writes in the pamphlet:

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<sup>11</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/archive/lenin/works/1917/sep/11.htm>

“It would be demanding something superhuman from Lenin and his comrades if we should expect of them that under such circumstances they should conjure forth the finest democracy, the most exemplary dictatorship of the proletariat and a flourishing socialist economy. By their determined revolutionary stand, their exemplary strength in action, and their unbreakable loyalty to international socialism, they have contributed whatever could possibly be contributed under such devilishly hard conditions. The danger begins only when they make a virtue of necessity and want to freeze into a complete theoretical system all the tactics forced upon them by these fatal circumstances, and want to recommend them to the international proletariat as a model of socialist tactics...

They render a poor service to international socialism for the sake of which they have fought and suffered; for they want to place in its storehouse as new discoveries all the distortions prescribed in Russia by necessity and compulsion – in the last analysis only by-products of the bankruptcy of international socialism in the present world war.”<sup>12</sup>

We all know now that it was the Bolshevik leaders, and especially Lenin, who emphasized countless times that Western European workers would do many things differently, better, more thoroughly, because they have, thanks to a higher development of economic life, more culture, more discipline, more knowledge, more organizational sense. As for the agrarian question, not only did they not present their defeat as a virtue, but on the contrary, at the Second Congress of the Communist International, they submitted a resolution that was adopted and which says the following on the points of interest to us:

“As a result of the economic backwardness of the country it was necessary in Russia to proceed to distribute the land among the peasants for their use. Only in comparatively few cases was it possible to use the land for the establishment of a so-called Soviet Farm, managed by the proletarian state on its own account.”

Meanwhile:

“In the advanced capitalist countries the Communist International considers that it is correct to preserve the large agricultural establishments and manage them on the lines of the ‘Soviet farms’ in Russia...

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<sup>12</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/ch08.htm>

The preservation of large landholdings serves best the interests of the revolutionary elements of the rural population, namely, the land less agricultural workers and semi-proletarian small land-holders... Besides, the nationalization of large land-holdings makes the urban population, at least in part, less dependent on the peasantry for their food.”<sup>13</sup>

In one of his letters, Engels compares the unrestrained current of great revolutions to the unstoppable course of natural disasters. Also Rosa Luxemburg in one of *The Spartacus Letters* speaks of the Russian revolution as a volcanic eruption. The October Decree on Land was the expression of the violent eruption of the Russian peasant masses – an eruption that completely buried under its scorching lava both the imperialist front by the uprising of the peasant soldier and junkerism by seizure of land property. Lenin's historical merit was precisely that he recognized in time the insurmountable force of this mass pressure, that he did not oppose it, like the Mensheviks, which would have entailed even more chaos and anarchy and led to the imminent collapse of the revolution, but on the contrary, he had picked up on this pressure, put it on the legal and organizational track, and at the same time – theoretically at least – created, through the establishment of a proletarian dictatorship, socialist industry and Soviet farms, the possibility of stopping petty-bourgeois economic anarchy in the countryside. But a complex problem as well as other, much simpler socialist problems, cannot be solved in principle without an international revolution.

## NEW BREST PEACE

About 50 years ago, Marx and Engels thought they could tell the Russian revolutionists: when the social revolution breaks out in Europe, Russian pre-capitalist agricultural relations will be able to transform themselves directly into a socialist economy. From the moment this was said, Russia's capitalist development demolished semi-capitalist agricultural relations, spawned great industrial centers with a revolutionary working class, but did not, or did only minimally, produce modern agriculture with adequate rural labor relations. However, the social revolution broke out in Russia, not in Europe.

And this is the way of the cross of the Russian Revolution – from one torment station to another, from peace with the Junker saber of Germany to the recently concluded peace with the hyenas of

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<sup>13</sup> <https://www.marxists.org/history/international/comintern/2nd-congress/doc03.htm>

world capital, from Brest-Litovsk to Genoa – in the hope of a world revolution. The Brest Peace, which Rosa Luxemburg criticized with deep concern that it might lead to the triumph of German imperialism and the collapse of the Russian Revolution, was indeed a dangerous "moment of respite." Now, or rather from the beginning of 1921, we have a new rendition of the Brest Peace, a new "moment of respite". Only then it was about concessions to German imperialism, which itself was very much threatened by its enemies in the arenas of war. How much more dangerous are the concessions to world capitalism imposed on the Russian Revolution by its isolation! The question is who will last longer: the capitalist world or the world devastated by countless invasions, the Soviet proletarian power exhausted and bleeding with a thousand wounds, and at the same time global capital finds in Russia its ally, although not Kolchak, Denikin or Wrangel, but instead a wide mass of peasant and petty-bourgeois producers who, as the basis of capitalism, are more dangerous to the proletarian revolution than all the tsarist generals of the counter-revolution. Will the Soviet government manage to build a state-socialist industry with concessions to usurious global capital and to keep workers' alliance with the peasant masses by supporting agriculture – until the European Revolution breaks out? This question is faced by the international proletariat and only it can answer it.

Today, Mensheviks of all stripes are roaring like known lions again – because of the new Brest peace policy, because of compromises with capital. We can answer them in the words of Rosa Luxemburg that the weakness of the Soviet power is the result of Menshevik wretchedness in all countries.

We would like to recommend to the workers to take to heart in particular what Rosa Luxemburg wrote at the end of the pamphlet under discussion, namely:

“All of us are subject to the laws of history, and it is only internationally that the socialist order of society can be realized. The Bolsheviks have shown that they are capable of everything that a genuine revolutionary party can contribute within the limits of historical possibilities. They are not supposed to perform miracles. For a model and faultless proletarian revolution in an isolated land, exhausted by world war, strangled by imperialism, betrayed by the international proletariat, would be a miracle.

What is in order is to distinguish the essential from the non-essential, the kernel from the accidental excrescences in the politics of the Bolsheviks. In the present period, when we

face decisive final struggles in all the world, the most important problem of socialism was and is the burning question of our time. It is not a matter of this or that secondary question of tactics, but of the capacity for action of the proletariat, the strength to act, the will to power of socialism as such. In this, Lenin and Trotsky and their friends were the *first*, those who went ahead as an example to the proletariat of the world; they are still the *only ones* up to now who can cry with Hutten: «I have dared»

This is the essential and *enduring* in Bolshevik policy. In *this* sense theirs is the immortal historical service of having marched at the head of the international proletariat with the conquest of political power and the practical placing of the problem of the realization of socialism, and of having advanced mightily the settlement of the score between capital and labor in the entire world. In Russia, the problem could only be posed. It could not be solved in Russia. And in *this* sense, the future everywhere belongs to «Bolshevism.»<sup>14</sup>

## REVOLUTIONARY CRITICISM

We stated: the views that Rosa Luxemburg expressed in the pamphlet under discussion were no longer hers from the November Revolution until her death.

But despite this, despite the errors and inaccuracies of this work, this booklet is a revolutionary work. For the criticism of Rosa Luxemburg differs from any opportunist criticism in that it can never harm the cause of revolution or a revolutionary party; on the contrary, it can only revive and support it - precisely because it is revolutionary criticism. Whoever imagines that this pamphlet must have been hidden at first because it could harm revolutionary Russia, and that it could only now be published because now allegedly Soviet power has a firm position in the world, only proves that he understands criticism only as opportunist criticism, harmful to the revolution and the revolutionary party, and that Rosa Luxemburg's spirit, as well as revolutionary Marxism in general, is for him a book closed with seven seals. If any criticism is likely to harm a revolutionary party or a revolution, it is not revolutionary criticism.

Rosa Luxemburg was, especially in the manner and method of criticism, a spirit from the spirit of Marx, the blood of his blood. Also in this pamphlet – despite all her mistakes! When Marx criticized the Revolution of 1848 or the Paris Commune, it was always a flogging with an iron rod

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14 <https://www.marxists.org/archive/luxemburg/1918/russian-revolution/ch08.htm>



of a policy of half-heartedness, indecision, passivity, and the praise of every revolutionary thought and every revolutionary act.

So did Rosa Luxemburg. In both *The Spartacus Letters* and in this pamphlet, her criticism turns step by step into a devastating, contemptuous critique of Menshevism, into a glorification of the Russian revolution and its leading party, into a passionate appeal to the international proletariat.

